

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8450
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E.O. 11652: N/A
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SUBJECT: VOTERS APPROVE POPULAR ELECTION OF UPPER
HOUSE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

1. THE REFERENDUM ON THE REFORM OF THE UPPER HOUSE OF THE
NEW SOUTH WALES (NSW) PARLIAMENT PASSED LAST SATURDAY
BY A VOTE OF 84 PERCENT YES TO 16 PERCENT NO. IN ITS
FINAL FORM THE REFERENDUM PROPOSITION, WHICH HAD BEEN
PUT FORWARD BY THE LABOR GOVERNMENT, WAS ENDORSED WITH
VARYING DEGREES OF ENTHUSIASM BY ALL THREE PARTIES.
THE STATE LEADER OF THE COUNTRY PARTY, LEON PUNCH,
ANNOUNCED THAT HE WOULD PERSONALLY VOTE NO, BUT REFRAINED
FROM CAMPAIGNING AGAINST THE PROPOSITION. MOST POLITICAL
OBSERVERS COUNT THE ELECTION RESULT AS A VICTORY FOR
THE LABOR PREMIER,
EVILLE WRAN, WHO CAMPAIGNED VIGOROUSLY
FOR ITS ADOPTION. THE OBSERVERS HERE NOW EXPECT THAT A
DECISION TO CALL A STATE ELECTION WILL BE TAKEN WELL
BEFORE THE LIFE OF THE CURRENT PARLIAMENT IS DUE TO
EXPIRE IN MAY 1979.

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2. THE EFFECT OF THE REFERENDUM VOTE IS TO MAKE THE
UPPER HOUSE OF THE STATE PARLIAMENT, KNOWN AS THE
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, AN ELECTIVE BODY AND TO REDUCE ITS
SIZE OVER A PERIOD OF TIME FROM 60 TO 45 MEMBERS. FOR
MORE THAN 100 YEARS THE UPPER HOUSE HAS BEEN A BODY WHOSE
NEW MEMBERS WERE ELECTED AT A JOINT SITTING OF THE

LOWER AND UPPER HOUSES. UNDER THE NEW SYSTEM FIFTEEN NEW MEMBERS WILL BE ELECTED DURING EACH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION FOR A TERM OF THREE PARLIAMENTS. EACH PARTY OR COALITION WILL PRESENT A LIST OF CANDIDATES FOR THE UPPER HOUSE AND WILL BE AWARDED SEATS ON A ROUGHLY PROPORTIONAL BASIS TO THE SIZE OF THE PARTIES' OVERALL POLL STATEWIDE. AT THE NEXT PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION, TO BE HELD BEFORE NEXT MAY, 32 PRESENT MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL WILL RETIRE AND 15 NEW MEMBERS WILL BE ELECTED. OF THOSE MEMBERS WHO WILL NOT RETIRE, HALF ARE LABOR AND HALF BELONG TO THE LIBERAL/COUNTRY PARTY COALITION. THERE IS, THEREFORE, A CHANCE THAT THE ALP COULD GAIN CONTROL OF THE UPPER HOUSE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY AT THE NEXT ELECTION. THERE IS ALSO THE INTERESTING AND UNFORESEEN PROSPECT THAT THE SMALL DEMOCRATIC PARTY, WHICH SHOWED SURPRISING STRENGTH IN THE FEDERAL ELECTIONS, COULD POLL MORE THAN THE MINIMUM 6.25 PERCENT OF THE VOTE NEEDED TO OBTAIN ONE SEAT IN THE UPPER HOUSE. IF IT DOES SO IT WILL HAVE THE VITAL SWING SEAT.

3. THE FINAL WORDING OF THE REFERENDUM IS A COMPROMISE IN WHICH SOME CONTROVERSIAL FEATURES IN LABOR'S INITIAL PROPOSAL WERE MODIFIED. THESE MODIFICATIONS WERE HELD TO BE A LIBERAL VICTORY AT THE TIME, BUT UPON FURTHER REFLECTION MOST LOCAL POLITICIANS ARE DESCRIBING THE WHOLE EXERCISE AS A TACTICAL TRIUMPH FOR THE LABOR PREMIER.
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AS THEY PUT IT, UNDER THE OLD SYSTEM LABOR HAD NO CHANCE OF GETTING CONTROL OF THE UPPER HOUSE, WHILE UNDER THE NEW SCHEME IT HAS AT LEAST AN EVEN CHANCE OF DOING SO.
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